

STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY
HEARING ON BIOTERRORISM
OCTOBER 9th, 2001

It's a privilege to hold today's hearing on improving the nation's preparedness for bioterrorism, and to continue the work that this committee began three years ago on this issue of special importance.

Yesterday, Governor Tom Ridge was sworn in as President Bush's Director of the new Office of Homeland Security. As our forces continue their actions over Afghanistan, we can expect that our enemies will try to strike against our country again. One of the most immediate tasks facing Governor Ridge as he takes on this new extraordinary responsibility is to close the gaps in our ability to deal with the possibility of bioterrorism on American soil. All of us in Congress stand ready to work with Governor Ridge and Secretary Thompson on this

vital assignment.

The response of the Centers for Disease Control, the FBI, and local health authorities to the recent anthrax cases in Florida shows that there are many strengths in our public health and law enforcement system. But as our witnesses today will attest, there is still much to be done.

Last week, Senator Frist and I proposed a five-fold increase in current federal funding to deal with the consequences of a possible bioterrorist attack. Today's hearing will provide further evidence that our \$1.4 billion plan is fully justified, and that we should act now to provide this emergency funding.

We want to reassure all Americans that much has already been done to assure their safety from such an attack, and to minimize the spread of biological agents if an attack does occur. The kind of heroism we witnessed from average Americans on September 11 B with Americans caring for and protecting their fellow citizens B would take place once again in responding to a bioterrorist threat.

But every day we delay in expanding our capabilities exposes innocent Americans to needless danger. We cannot afford to wait.

That's why Senator Frist and I began addressing this challenge three years ago. Last November, our initial legislation to strengthen the nation's capacity to respond to bioterrorism was enacted into law. Now we look forward to working with the Administration and our colleagues in Congress to assure that the essential work of strengthening these defenses is accomplished as soon as possible.

Our first priority must be to prevent an attack from

ever occurring. That means moving quickly to enhance our intelligence capacity and our ability to infiltrate terrorist cells, wherever they may exist. It also means using the renewed partnership between the United States and Russia to make sure that dangerous biological agents do not fall into the hands of terrorists.

Russia currently holds the largest supply of potential biological weapons. We have an opportunity now to make needed progress in securing these dangerous biological materials. We've worked with Russia to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, and we must work together now to prevent the spread of biological weapons.

We must also enhance America's preparedness for a

bioterrorist attack. Our citizens need not live their lives in fear of a biological attack, but building strong defenses is the right thing to do.

Unlike the assaults on New York and Washington, a biological attack would not be accompanied by explosions and police sirens. In the days that followed, victims of the attack would visit their family doctor or the local emergency room, complaining of fevers, aches in the joints or perhaps a sore throat. The actions taken in those first few days will do much to determine how severe the

consequences of the attack will be.

The keys to responding effectively to a bioterrorist attack lie in three key concepts: immediate detection, immediate treatment and immediate containment.

To improve **detection**, we should improve the training of doctors to recognize the symptoms of a bioterrorist attack, so that precious hours will not be lost as doctors try to diagnose their patients. As we've seen in recent days, patients with anthrax and other rarely encountered diseases are often initially diagnosed incorrectly. In addition, public health laboratories

need the training, the equipment and the personnel to identify biological weapons as quickly as possible.

In Boston, a recently installed electronic communication system will enable physicians to report unusual symptoms rapidly to local health officials, so that an attack could be identified quickly. Too often, however, as a CDC report has stated: "Global travel and commerce can move microbes around the world at jet speed, yet our public health surveillance systems still rely on a 'Pony Express' system of paper-based reporting and telephone calls."

To improve the treatment of victims of a bioterrorist attack, we must strengthen our hospitals and emergency medical plans. Boston, New York and a few other communities have plans to convert National Guard armories

and other public buildings into temporary medical facilities, and other communities need to be well prepared too. Even cities with extensive plans need more resources to ensure that those plans will be effective when they are needed.

To improve containment, we must make certain that federal supplies of vaccines and antibiotics are available

quickly to assist local public health officials in preventing the disease from spreading.

Developing new medical resources for the future is also essential. Scientists recently reported that they had determined the complete DNA sequence of the microbe that causes plague. This breakthrough may allow new treatments and vaccines to be developed against this ancient disease scourge. We should use the remarkable skills of our universities and biotechnology companies to give us new and better treatments in the battle against bioterrorism.

Much has already been done to improve the nation's readiness, but we need to be even more prepared. Senator Frist and I look forward to working with our colleagues on this committee and in Congress to achieve these extremely important goals. Senator Edwards and Senator Hagel have already put forward a number of significant proposals. And we welcome the contributions and leadership of our colleagues, Senator Corzine, Senator Bayh, and Senator Cleland, as they testify before us today.

September 11th was a turning point in America's history. Our challenge now is to do everything we can to learn from that tragic day, and prepare effectively for the future.